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ABSTRACT

In examining the Eskimo and Indian populations of the Canadian North, the Arctic, and the Subarctic for relationships between education and personal identity, the authors (1) describe the ways in which social and cultural trends have affected education; (2) study the individual for ways in which prolonged exposure to formal education affects students' values, attitudes, aspiration, and self-esteem; and (3) describe implications drawn from their findings for educational policy for the Canadian North. Particular topics include governmental intervention, minority group status, cultural replacement, psychological effects, and identity conflict. Suggested changes are to increase the validation of the student's self-image and his self-esteem as an Indian or Eskimo and to increase the effective involvement of Indian and Eskimo adults in the formulation of educational policy for their children. [Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document.] (BD)

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Background Paper - 5 C.

CONFERENCE ON CROSS-CULTURAL
EDUCATION IN THE NORTH

Montreal - August 1969THE CULTURAL SITUATION IN THE NORTH

(Commentary)

Cross-Cultural Education in the North
and its Implications for Personal
Identity: The Canadian Case

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Introduction

Professor Vallee's comprehensive paper draws attention to three phenomena which have deeply influenced both education in the North and the psychological integrity of its indigenous peoples: 1) the recency of large-scale governmental intervention; 2) the minority group status of the Eskimo with the attendant powerlessness, social exclusion, and economic deprivation; 3) the commitment of change agencies and their personnel to a policy of "cultural replacement".

Although Professor Vallee is discussing the Canadian Arctic, in our view these three phenomena are equally relevant to our understanding of social and cultural change in the Middle North. 1 which in the West is largely populated by Metis and Indian groups speaking Athabaskan languages and in the East by Indian groups speaking Algonkian languages. Therefore in this paper we shall discuss both the Eskimo and the Indian populations of the Canadian North, including the Arctic and Subarctic. 2

First we shall describe the ways in which the social and cultural trends noted above affect northern education. We shall then shift our focus to the individual level to examine the ways in which prolonged exposure to formal education affects students' values, attitudes, aspirations and self-esteem; in short their sense of personal identity. For it is ultimately the individual who must decide whether to continue his education or drop out, whether to move South or remain in the North, whether to work for wages in a town or carry on the traditional hunting, trapping and fishing way of life.

In this discussion findings from our investigation of identity

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conflict among Cree Indian adolescents from Northern Quebec are presented. Finally we shall consider briefly the implications of our findings for educational policy in the Canadian North.

Governmental Intervention, Minority Group Status, and Cultural Replacement

Since World War II the pace of change in the Arctic and Middle North has accelerated, especially as a consequence of the development of D.E.W. line military facilities, the expansion of civilian governmental operations, and the growth of northern mining. The introduction and expansion of formal education in these areas have been a key concomitant of these processes.

However, as many authors have noted, northern development in Canada has not proceeded in an orderly, planned manner. (Hobart and Brant 1966, Hughes 1965, Jenness 1968.) Instead the exigencies of military priorities, the vagaries of mineral exploration and development, and shifts in government policy have been major factors determining the rate, nature and locales affected by development. Consequently communities vary widely in the degree to which traditional subsistence patterns persist, in their degree of contact with the dominant Euro-Canadian society, and in their attitudes toward formal education. Some groups have experienced rapid modernization, while others have remained largely traditional in their orientation. The rapidity of change and its unevenness have resulted in a variety of economic adaptations, with each community displaying a different combination of traditional, modified traditional, and industrially oriented patterns, along with substantial unemployment and under-employment in many areas.

Nevertheless, it is clear that traditional ways of thinking and behaving remain important almost everywhere. Vallee has cogently illustrated this point with his account of the rabies and influenza epidemics in an Eskimo community, while Honigmann has shown that even those Eskimos who are committed to life in a northern town retain deep positive feelings for the traditional hunting life of the past. (Honigmann 1965, Vallee 1969.) Thus, Eskimo and Indian parents and children are still influenced greatly by a traditional kin-oriented, subsistence based way of life. Before they enter school northern children frequently hear only an indigenous language at home and are socialized in terms of traditional goals, values and attitudes. Although Eskimo and Indian children have been superficially exposed to different ways of life through observing whites and the more acculturated members of their communities, before entering school most children have had no meaningful contact with the "Kabloona" or "white" world. (Hobart and Brant 1966, Honigmann 1965, Sindell 1968.)

Despite the regional diversity in acculturative level and economic opportunities, schools have generally not adapted their programs to serve local needs. Thus, students have not been prepared to take advantage of the economic opportunities available in their region. Vallee (1969) notes, for example, that the Eskimos and Indians of the Northwest Territories "have been able to take only minimal advantage of mining and other developments taking place on their own doorstep ... (chiefly because of their) lack of training and experience in industrial occupations." Another example is the governmental policy forbidding vocational training in Indian schools before grade nine, even though many students have begun school as late as age thirteen or fourteen and have planned to stop school after three or four years.

One reason why northern schools have not responded adequately to local conditions is that Indians and Eskimos, because of their minority status, have had little or no authority over the selection of school locations, curricula or personnel. A centralized governmental bureaucracy has controlled the formulation of educational policy and goals, the recruitment of staff and the determination of curricula. Almost all teachers in northern schools are Euro-Canadians, trained in and for southern Canadian institutions. While often very dedicated, most of these teachers have had no special training for northern living or teaching children in a cross-cultural context.

Furthermore, many of these teachers possess negative attitudes toward the cultural patterns which prevail in the Metis, Eskimo or Indian communities they serve. (King 1967, Slobodin 1966.) Their negative stereotypes have been reinforced because, as Vallee and others have pointed out, social exclusion or segregation is characteristic of northern settlements. Finally, almost all teachers return to southern Canadian schools after one, two or three years in the North.

The dearth of indigenous teachers and the lack of special training for teachers in northern schools reflect a policy of "cultural replacement", or "the attempt, in under-developed areas, to replace the traditional culture with a modern one in a short period ...". (Hobart and Brant 1966:48.) Many educators admit openly that they want to wean their Indian and Eskimo students away from their cultures. (Ibid.) This attitude is reflected not only in curricula, which have generally not been adapted to reflect northern realities, but also in the extensive use of residential schools and the virtually exclusive use of English as the medium of instruction. (Graburn 1969, Jenness 1968, King 1967.) Very recently some efforts have been made to develop instructional materials in Eskimo,³ but comparable materials in the northern Indian languages are not currently available.

The Psychological Impact of Education

How does this system of education affect the people who pass through it? Many studies report that students learn to devalue their own "Eskimeness" or "Indianness" but lack confidence in their ability to cope effectively with the urban industrial life style to which they have been exposed in school. The policy of cultural replacement has created intense conflicts in self-image with feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness. (Berreman 1964, Clairmont 1963, Hobart 1968, Hobart and Brant 1966, Hughes 1960, and Parker 1964.) In addition intergenerational conflict about education is prominent because parents feel that the present educational system threatens the integrity of their way of life and causes their children to become disrespectful, disobedient, lazy, and aggressive. (Hughes 1960, Sindell and Wintrob 1969.)

Although Indian and Eskimo parents often want their children to attend school for a few years so that they can learn English and have better opportunities for employment, they are ambivalent or opposed to prolonged education because of its negative effects on their children's attitudes and behavior. Intense parental opposition to education frequently becomes the precipitating factor in students' identity conflict. Symptoms of psychopathological significance develop because during adolescence students are forced to decide whether to continue their education in the face of parental opposition or return home to help their parents in the expected manner.

Education and Identity Conflict among Cree Indian Youth

To clarify the origins of these psychological problems and to ascertain how widespread and severe they are the authors studied virtually all (108) Mistassini and Waswanipi Cree adolescents who attended elementary or high schools in 1967 and 1968.

"God gave people some skills so they could support their family and look after them. A long time ago when we stayed in the bush, I didn't know anything about the white man's way. Everything my mother gave me, I appreciated it. My father showed me how to be a hunter. That's what I like to do; my friends too. We want our sons to stay around here, where they were born. And work around here - cutting trees, or in mining. But when they go to school, the young ones, they want to work in town. They just spend their money and drink. They don't help their parents or their small brothers and sisters. Sometimes they don't even have money to come home. So what good does it do to let our children go to school?"

This quotation comes from a 72 year old hunter named "Samuel Beaverskin",⁴ one of the 1500 Cree Indians of the Mistassini and Waswanipi Bands living in north-central Quebec, south and east of James Bay. Samuel has never been to school himself, but five of his twelve children are presently attending and three more have been to school in the past. The traditional Cree hunting-trapping-fishing mode of life continues to be culturally viable, but as in other areas, acculturative changes are occurring as mining and forestry operations expand, roads and communications are introduced, and fur prices decline. (Chance 1968, LaRusic 1968.) Concurrently the traditional patterns of enculturation are being disrupted since most Cree children are sent to residential schools in "southern" Canadian towns for ten months of each year, returning to their families only for the two-month summer vacation period.

The socialization experiences of these children alternate between, on the one hand, the hunting-trapping group, fishing camp, and summer settlement, and, on the other, the "white" ⁵ urban industrial centers where they attend school. The purpose of our study has been to examine the psychological consequences of the discontinuities in enculturation which Cree students experience as they live alternately in these two very different environments. Our central hypothesis is that identity conflict experienced by Cree students during adolescence reflects their attempts to resolve incompatibilities between the two major models for identification available to them: the "Traditional", represented mainly by adult kin, and the "white" middle or working class, represented primarily by teachers, counselors, and foster families.

Data has been collected by means of an Adolescent Adjustment Interview schedule. Consisting of some 100 items the AAI was designed to investigate each student's educational, occupational, and social aspirations, the degree of parental opposition they engendered, the degree of confidence the student had in achieving his goals along each of the three parameters, and the prominence of his feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and depression. Ethnographic fieldwork from 1966 to 1968 at the summer settlements, in the bush, and in a residential school provided essential background information on the school milieu, Cree enculturation, family interaction patterns and attitudes toward education. Of the group under study ninety-three attended elementary schools, while fifteen students were enrolled in community high schools and lived with white foster families. As in many other northern areas only during the past decade have most Mistassini and Waswanipi children attended school. In the study population the age at school entry ranged from six to thirteen years, with a mean of 8.6 years.

During their pre-school years Cree children participate fully in the traditional life of the hunting-trapping group. Models for identification are provided by parents, grandparents, and adults of

the extended kin group. Children assume contributory roles and are given responsibility in accordance with their proficiency in performing tasks having a clearly defined usefulness to the family and hunting group. (Rogers and Rogers 1963, Sindell 1968.) Boys' "play" such as hunting birds and setting rabbit snares, is patterned after the activities of the adult hunter. Girls help their mothers collect firewood, cook and wash clothes. Times for eating and sleeping are determined by individual preference rather than schedule. Children learn through experience that appropriate behavior involves emotional reticence, self-reliance, generosity, and cooperation in play and in the performance of tasks. There is a strong social sanction against the overt expression of aggression, either verbally or physically and throughout their pre-school years competition among peers is criticized. Fighting, quarreling and "taking back" are strongly disapproved. The cultural emphasis on generosity and on effort directed toward the benefit of the kin and hunting group is reinforced by the fundamental Cree belief that the "soul spirit" (Mistabeo) guiding each man's behavior "is pleased with generosity, kindness and help to others" and that such behavior is related to success in hunting. (Speck 1935:44.)

With the shift from traditional milieu to white urban residential school setting, Cree children are removed from their families at the time they are becoming competent to assume responsibilities within the hunting group, or for the care of the household and younger siblings. They are required to learn a new language, eat "store food" rather than "bush food" and abide by rules and a time structure completely at odds with their previous experience. (Wintrob and Sindell 1968.) Emotional expressivity is encouraged, and so is competitiveness and individualistic achievement in scholastic performance, athletics and extracurricular activities. Overt expression of aggression is tolerated to a much greater degree than is acceptable in their family milieu. Their teachers and dormitory counselors know relatively little about Cree life, its value orientations and belief system and generally conceive of their role as preparing children for life in a modern industrial society. In the residential schools instruction is in English, the students follow the normal provincial curricula, and there are no vocational courses specifically oriented to northern economic opportunities.

As their school careers extend over six, eight, ten, or even twelve years, prolonged separation from the life of their family makes it practically impossible for Cree students to learn the skills required for successful adaptation to bush life. At the same time they acquire a growing knowledge of and some capacity to adapt to the life-style of the white urban society that surrounds them. Both of these factors contribute to a growing sense of alienation from the traditional life of the Band, although students continue to experience anxiety in their interaction with whites. Through continuing contact with residential school staff, who live in the dormitories with the students and are actively involved with the students'

extracurricular activities, most Cree children ultimately develop close relationships with one or more of their teachers and counselors. This is particularly true of the high school students, who live with white foster families. In this way the attitudes, beliefs and behavior patterns of their white teachers, counselors and foster families become alternate models for identification which contrast sharply with "Traditional" models of the students' pre-school and summer experience.

Most Cree adults recognize the usefulness of having some of their children attend school for two or three years in order to learn enough English (and/or French) to function as intermediaries in their increasingly frequent contacts with white government officials, tourists and potential employers. However, faced with the great need for skilled help to maintain the continuity and effective functioning of the hunting group, parents exert mounting pressure on their children, beginning early in adolescence, to stop school and return to help on the trapline and "learn the Indian ways". Those students who persevere with their education in the face of parental opposition characteristically show symptoms of depression and feelings of guilt based on their refusal to comply with the needs of the kin group. Diminution of familial emotional support compounds these feelings. The sense of isolation which results intensifies students' fears of failure in achieving their aspirations of completing high school and going on to become nurses, teachers, secretaries, engineers, bush pilots, mechanics or draughtsmen. It also contributes in a reactive way to their increasing emotional investment in interactions with teachers, counselors and foster families, and to a growing sensitivity to rejection by whites.

Given the types of enculturative discontinuities and inter-generational conflict described, we hypothesized that a large proportion of the AAI protocols would reveal marked identity conflict, as defined by a sharp disparity between the student's stated educational, occupational, and social aspirations as compared with his expectations of achievement, by the student's manifest anxiety in response to his parents' opposition to the various goals he has set for himself, and by a majority of positive responses in that section of the AAI probing feelings of anxiety, inadequacy and depression. On this basis we rated 48% of the 108 students as having clearly defined identity conflict.

In an additional 14% of AAI protocols indications of identity conflict were sufficiently pronounced to constitute manifest psychopathology or "identity confusion". (Erikson 1968.) Thirteen of these sixteen cases were female elementary school students, ranging in age from thirteen to seventeen, whose AAI protocols were characterized by strong polarization toward a white middle-class life-style.⁶

Clinically, they could be diagnosed as having depressive disorders with insomnia, loss of appetite, irritability, crying spells, social withdrawal, loss of interest in extracurricular activities, isolation and alienation from friends, family, and school personnel, feelings of rejection, and inability to cope with academic demands. In almost every case these symptoms have been precipitated by confrontation between students and their parents over whether to continue school or return to the family. This confrontation generates intense anxiety as students struggle to resolve conflicting wishes to adopt a white middle-class life-style and yet at the same time avoid total disruption of emotional ties with their parents.

The anguish of identity confusion is dramatically illustrated by the following quotation, taken from the letter of a seventeen year old girl to a white teacher with whom she had related closely in the past:

"Could I please work at your place again. It would help me a little to overcome my shyness. Maybe if you gave me extra help it would help me lots. Because right now I can't bear it when people talk about me being shy... I have no definite personality right now, so give me a personality. I know I am asking lots but please help me."

Implications for Northern Education Policy

Spindler has suggested that the search for identity is a constant process "in all human beings as members of cultural systems" (1968:335) and that this process becomes acute when divergent cultural systems come into contact. Education in such circumstances can foster identity conflict by forcing people to choose between two contrasting sets of values, role expectations, and models for identification or it can promote personal and cultural synthesis.⁷ Northern education in Canada has been characterized in philosophy by cultural replacement and in practice by enculturative discontinuity. The result has frequently been identity conflict and, in some cases, identity confusion.

What can be done to reduce identity conflict and prevent identity confusion among Indian and Eskimo students? Our findings, in common with those of several other recent studies (Hobart 1968, King 1967, Melling 1967, Sim 1968, Tremblay et al 1968) suggest that present educational practices jeopardize the continuity, vitality and cultural integrity of Indian and Eskimo life that both indigenous northern groups and the government declare themselves determined to preserve. Our findings also indicate that the greatest degree of unresolved identity conflict is experienced by those students who

polarize most strongly toward the white middle-class identity model under conditions of intense parental opposition to formal education

Thus two essential principles for the reduction of identity conflict among Indian and Eskimo youth are (1) the validation of the student's self-image and the strengthening of his self-esteem as an Indian or Eskimo and (2) the effective involvement of Indian and Eskimo adults in the formulation of educational policy for their children. To operationalize these principles would require that combined residential-day schools be located in northern settlements and be staffed by indigenous teachers and counselors. Teaching in the first three or four grades would be conducted in the children's mother tongue. Thereafter the curriculum would be bilingual but would include instructional materials in the indigenous language on local history, government, and religion throughout the children's school years. School vacations would be scheduled to allow students to spend time with their families in the bush or in the outlying camps in order to retain familiarity with the traditional life-style and acquire the relevant skills. Teachers, both indigenous and Euro-Canadian, would receive training in the history, language, and culture of the communities they are to serve. Furthermore Eskimo and Indian personnel of all ages would be recruited to teach in their local schools. For the upper elementary and high school grades students would attend community schools in northern towns closest to their homes, but the same principles of course content, bilingual curricula and specially trained teachers would apply. These students would live in cottage-type residences staffed by both whites and Indians or Eskimos until they started high school. During high school students would live with Indian, Eskimo, or white foster families. Provision would be made for regular visits home and for parental visits with their children at school.

At present parents perceive formal education as having limited usefulness and regard it as the white man's attempt to alienate their children from them, their way of life, and the North. Were school programs designed to serve local needs⁸ and reflect more adequately the indigenous culture, history, and language, then parental opposition to formal education would be reduced. Were Indian and Eskimo parents empowered to operate their own school districts and be fully participating members of school boards in towns where their children attend community schools, then they would be equipped by experience to understand the purposes of education, would be assured of its relevance, and would come to conceptualize the schools as their own rather than imposed on them. Consequently intergenerational conflict over education would be reduced.

Were policies such as those we have outlined implemented we contend that Indian and Eskimo youths would retain a positive sense of cultural and personal identity and would acquire the linguistic, technical, and behavioral skills they need to participate effectively in the development of the North.

FOOTNOTES

1. The term "Middle North" refers to those regions which are north of the settled areas of Canada (as indicated by the lack of railroads, roads, large population centers, and developed land) and south of the high Arctic. Thus it would include the northern portions of the Canadian provinces, the Yukon Territory, and the southern part of the Northwest Territories. (Trevor Lloyd, personal communication).
2. There are, of course, important cultural and historical differences between the Arctic and the Middle North but it is beyond the scope and purpose of the present paper to enumerate them.
3. For example in Nouveau Quebec for use in the early primary grades.
4. All personal and place names used in this section are fictitious except those locating the region and identifying the two Cree Indian Bands under study.
5. The term "white" is used in this context to represent all Canadians of non-Indian (or Eskimo) extraction who are identified and labelled as "white" by the Cree under study.
6. This subject is discussed in greater detail in Wintrob and Sindell 1969b.
7. Attempts to resolve identity conflict through synthesis of the two major models for identification are discussed in Sindell and Wintrob 1969, Wintrob and Sindell 1968, and Wintrob and Sindell 1969a.
8. Ideally multi-track curricula could be introduced so that students could choose for themselves between programs emphasizing university preparation and those emphasizing traditional subsistence skills or modern northern vocational training.

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